RESOLUTION NO. 21

MIGRATORY AND SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

In 1959, the AFL-CIO recognizing a moral, social and economic responsibility to the desperately poor and cruelly deprived two million migratory and seasonal agricultural workers of the United States undertook a pilot program in the Central Valley of California to determine how the labor movement could most effectively help these wage-earners and their families achieve for themselves a standard of life which includes the privileges of citizenship, equal social and economic opportunities, an adequate diet, decent shelter, proper health care, and the amenities every American has a right to expect.

As was expected, the effort of the AFL-CIO to organize the exploited farm worker ran into brutal opposition from the big growers and ranchers who run California's huge factory farms. Despite this, positive results were achieved, although there was no spectacular organizational success. Nonetheless, the very fact that the AFL-CIO showed that it did care excited the hopes and expectations of many Amer icans, both in and out of the labor movement, who have been deeply concerned with the social injustice, economic hazard, and the moral failure, implicit in the practical exclusion of two million citizens from the benefits and privileges of American society.

The program, which was admittedly costly, did not produce any easy successes. Nor did it result in the mass organization of hundreds of thousands of new union members. Every development, however, indicated that the successful organization of hired farm workers into an effective self-supporting union can be achieved through a persevering, dedicated, patient effort on the part of the entire labor movement.

Most noteworthy is the inescapable conclusion that the successes won so far constitute a powerful practical argument for the continuance of our program to organize agricultural workers, apart from the moral responsibility of American unionists to fellow workers who are victimized by the naked exploitation of agricultural enterprises which are frequently financial speculations or stock market operations.

Millions of dollars of wage increases have been won for migratory and seasonal workers already through the AFL-CIO organizing drive in a striking demonstration that collective bargaining can be an effective instrument for the economic rehabilitation of the wage workers in the fields.

A numerous corps of dedicated rank and file union leaders has been trained whose loyalty and leadership abilities have been tested and proved in the hard struggles over the last two years.

New hope and determination have been given to many idealistic Americans and American organizations, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, religious and lay, who see in the renewed effort of the American labor movement on behalf of America's forgotten people a convincing evidence that morality can become a powerful motivating factor in the economics and politics of our society.

Government officials on Federal, state, and county levels who have more or less helplessly deplored the abuse of human beings implicit in the indecently substandard life forced on hired farm workers and their families now approach their tasks confident of support for their efforts to enforce existing laws and to secure remedial legislation in the many situations where the present rules are entirely inadequate.

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U.S. Citizens who toil as hired farm workers will perform the essential tasks on the great commercial farms of the nation. These citizens ask only a reasonable wage, permitting them a fair standard of living in return for their hard work. It is necessary only to require that these workers be paid the prevailing wage to end the merciless exploitation resulting from international traffic in hired farm labor.

Organizationally, even the relatively modest union successes until now have had political significance in that the hired farm workers who are organized register and vote for the first time and thus enter into the democratic community on the side of the progressive forces of the nation very often in sufficient numbers to have a decisive effect on election results.

Ultimately there is no doubt that the migratory workers who are increasingly wage-earners on corporately owned factory farms will constitute a powerful progressive union on the American scene which will make its own substantial contribution to the well-being of the nation.

Recognizing these facts, this Convention of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO

commends the men and women, from the leadership of the labor movement to the patient pickets, who have made so gallant a beginning on one of the great historic tasks of the American labor movement;

urges the AFL-CIO, all its affiliated Departments and International Unions to renew their support to the agricultural worker organizational effort;

calls upon the affiliated unions of the IUD and the AFL-CIO to support the organizational undertaking financially, by publicity in their newspapers and magazines, by cooperation in the legislative effort on behalf of the hired farm workers, and by direct coordination with the actual organization effort;

pledges the loyalty and support of the men and women members of the affiliated unions of the IUD, AFL-CIO to this great moral cause, that is, the redemption of the American promise to the mer women, and children in the families of two million forgotten people, America's migratory and seasonal agricultural workers.

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